

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 HONG K 01194 020549Z

13

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 SAM-01 NIC-01 SAJ-01 IO-14 OMB-01 DRC-01

/136 W

----- 044323

P 020500Z FEB 74

FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9449

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MANILA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI PRIROITY

USLO PEKING PRIORITY

CINCPAC PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 1194

PHNOM PENH FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY INGERSOLL

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CH, VS

SUBJECT: PEKING AND THE SPRATLYS

SUMMARY: WE BELIEVE THAT CHANCES OF SOME EVENTUAL PRC MILITARY REACTION TO THE GVN MOVE IN THE SPRATLYS ARE FAIRLY GOOD. THE TIMING, HOWEVER, WILL DEPEND ON PEKING'S ASSESSMENT OF ITS TACTICAL CAPABILITY TO CARRY OFF THE OPERATION WITH LITTLE RISK OF FAILURE. ANY CHINESE ACTION IN THE SPRATLYS WOULD PROBABLY AVOID CONFLICT WITH ROC FORCES AND COULD STOP SHORT OF ACTUAL OCCUPATION OF TERRITORY. END SUMMARY.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 HONG K 01194 020549Z

1. PRESUMABLY THE PRC HAD ANTICIPATED SOME GVN MOVE IN THE SPRATLYS AS A POSSIBLE REACTION TO THE DEBACLE OF JAN. 19-20. GIVEN PEKING'S POSITION THAT IT WILL TAKE FIRM ACTION IF PROVOKED (HONG KONG 1037), WE WOULD RATE THE CHANCES OF SOME EVENTUAL PRC REACTION TO THE GVN MOVE AS FAIRLY GOOD. HOWEVER, THE TIMING OF ANY CHINESE ACTION IN THE SPRATLEYS WILL DEPEND UPON PEKING'S ASSESSMENT OF ITS TACTICAL CAPABILITY TO CARRY OFF THE OPERATION WITH LITTLE RISK OF FAILURE.

2. THE PRC APPARENTLY HAS THE CAPABILITY OF LANDING FORCES IN THE SPRATLYS AGAINST THE TYPE OF MILITARY RESISTANCE THE GVN PROVIDED IN THE PARACELS AND CARRYING OUT SOME LIMITED AIR OPERATIONS WITH IL-28'S. IT IS UNCERTAIN TO US, HOWEVER, HOW THE CHINESE RATE THEIR OWN PRESENT CAPABILITY IN THIS AREA AS AGAINST GVN AIR AND NAVAL DEFENSES.

3. WE SUSPECT THAT IN ANY OPERATION IN THE SPRATLYS THE PRC WILL ATTEMPT TO AVOID INVOLVEMENT WITH ROC FORCES. PEKING HAS CERTAINLY TAKEN NOTE OF TAIPEI'S LOW PROFILE ON THE PARACEL INCIDENT AND IT WOULD SEEM TO MAKE SENSE FROM PEKING'S ANGLE TO SIGNAL OR INFORM TAIPEI OF ITS INTENTION TO AVOID HOSTILITIES. SUCH AN APPROACH WOULD UNDERSCORE THE MUTUAL NATIONAL INTEREST OF THE TWO PARTIES IN THIS AFFAIR AND COULD CONCEIVABLY BE A PRECEDENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT AND COMMUNICATION ON OTHER ISSUES. THIS TACTIC WOULD ALSO DIMINISH THE SPECTER OF A THREAT TO TAIWAN AND PRESUMABLY REDUCE U.S. CONCERN ABOUT CHINESE ACTION IN THE SPRATLYS.

4. NEXT TO THE TACTICAL PROBLEM, THE PRC MUST BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE POLITICAL COST INVOLVED IN ANY MILITARY ACTION THEY SHOULD TAKE IN THE SPRATLYS. ALTHOUGH PEKING HAS A BASIS FOR AGAIN CLAIMING PROVOCATION BY SAIGON, A TAKEOVER OF THE GVN OCCUPIED ISLANDS IN THE SPRATLYS WOULD PRESUMABLY CAUSE SERIOUS TROUBLE IN CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH THE ASEAN NATIONS AND OTHER COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE DRV. ALSO THE CHINESE PROBABLY MUST CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY, HOWEVER, FAINT, THAT THEIR INTERVENTION MIGHT LEAD TO PLA CLASHES WITH FILIPINO FORCES, AN EVENT WHICH WOULD PRESUMABLY MEET WITH LESS UNANIMITY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD THAN THE ROUT OF THE GVN UNITS.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 HONG K 01194 020549Z

5. HOWEVER, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE CHINESE WILL LIMIT ANY COUNTERACTION IN THE SPRATLYS TO OUSTING THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE AND NOT THEMSELVES TRY TO OCCUPY TERRITORY. WITHDRAWAL AFTER A PUNITIVE OPERATION WOULD PRESUMABLY MITIGATE REACTION IN HANOI AND ELSEWHERE, ENHANCE THE IMAGE OF CHINESE RECTITUDE, AND AVOID THE DANGER AND PROBLEMS OF RETAINING FORCES IN THE RATHER REMOTE SPRATLYS.

6. FROM THE POLITICAL STANDPOINT, PEKING IS PROBABLY PREPARED TO TAKE AT LEAST THIS SORT OF IN-AND-OUT ACTION, AVOIDING IF POSSIBLE ROC FORCES. BUT THEY WILL DO SO ONLY WHEN CONFIDENT OF THE MILITARY OUTCOME. JUDGING FROM THE CHRONOLOGY AND PATTERN OF PEKING'S BEHAVIOR PRIOR TO THE JAN. 19 PARACEL CLASH (WHICH PUBLICLY WAS PRECEDED BY ONLY THE SIMPLE ROUTINE ASSERTION OF CHINA'S CLAIM TO BOTH THE PARACELS AND THE SPRATLYS CONTAINED IN THE JAN 11 FOREIGN MINISTRY STATEMENT) THE CHINESE COULD ACT IN THE SPRATLYS WITHOUT ISSUING ANY VERBAL FOREWARNING OF THEIR INTENTIONS.
ALLEN

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, TERRITORIAL CLAIMS, SPRATLYS, COMBAT OPERATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 FEB 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974HONGK01194
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: HONG KONG
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740260/aaaacdx.tel
Line Count: 126
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 JUN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 JUN 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <30 DEC 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PEKING AND THE SPRATLYS SUMMARY: WE BELIEVE THAT CHANCES OF SOME EVENTUAL PRC MILITARY
TAGS: PFOR, CH, VS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005